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## BLUE ORIGIN LAUNCHES ALL-WOMAN CELEBRITY CREW ON SPACE FLIGHT

**Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin launched his fiancee Lauren Sanchez into space Monday with an all-female celebrity crew that included Katy Perry**

### 10-MINUTE-LONG FLIGHT TOOK OFF FROM TEXAS

The New Shepard rocket blasted off on the quick up-and-down trip from West Texas. The fringes of space beckoned some 65 miles (105 kilometers) up, promising a few precious minutes of weightlessness. Sanchez, a helicopter pilot and former TV journalist, invited the others for the 10-minute flight, packing on star power with Perry and Gayle King

### US' FIRST SPACEFLIGHT WITH WOMEN CREW

- Blue Origin declined to say how much the flight cost or who paid what. The trip came two months before Sanchez and Bezos marry
- The celebrity launch of the space flight was the nation's first where an all-women crew filled seats. The other all-female crew in 64 years of human spaceflight was in 1963 helmed by Valentina Tereshkova

**11th**

**HUMAN SPACEFLIGHT FOR THE WASHINGTON STATE-BASED COMPANY**

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

# BMRCL runs fewer trains, near stampede at KG Metro stn

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

It was a near-stampede situation at Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Metro Station at Majestic on Monday morning as the station was jam-packed with commuters scrambling for space as metro trains were operated at an interval of 10 minutes instead of regular 3-5 minutes during peak hours.

People queued up till the first floor of the station, while the train arrived at the underground station, even at 8.50 am. The situation started to get worse from 9 am and continued till the train frequency started to improve. Commuters blamed the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd, saying BMRCL is keen to hike the fares, but is least bothered about commuters. BMRCL might have assumed there would be less crowd on Monday because of the government holiday for Ambedkar Jayanti. But many private organisations and tech firms had a regular working day, they said.

Peak hours for BMRCL are 8 am till 12 noon and from 4 pm to 9 pm on weekdays. Regular commuters said the trains are operated every 3-5 minutes during peak hours and on Monday, there was one train every 10 minutes from Majestic, leading to chaos. They complained that even as the crowd kept swelling and commuters pushed each other to get inside trains, the limited staff did nothing.

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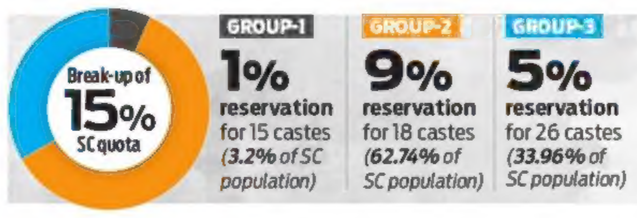
**HONOURING BABASAHEB WITH GRACE**

President Droupadi Murmu with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union minister J P Nadda, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Sonia Gandhi during a ceremony to pay tribute to B R Ambedkar on his birth anniversary, in New Delhi on Monday. There was a generous show of courtesy and grace from all sides at the event | PTI

# As promised, T'gana first off the blocks on SC sub-quota

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Hyderabad




TELANGANA on Monday became the first state in the country to implement SC categorisation, with the state government issuing GOs notifying the Telangana Scheduled Caste (Rationalisation of Reservation) Act, 2025, its guidelines as well as roster points.

"On the auspicious day of the birth anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar, the Telangana state government paid the best tributes by bringing into force a great Act of social justice addressing a long overdue demand of classification of SC sub-castes," Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said in a post on social media.

In its August 1, 2024 verdict, the Supreme Court had upheld the power of states to legislate separate quotas within the SC category. The same day, the chief minister declared in the state assembly that Telangana would lead the nation in legislating sub-categorisation.

The Telangana Scheduled Caste (Rationalisation of Reservation) Act creates three distinct bunches within the existing 15% SC reservation based on population and socio-economic indicators.

Group-1, consisting of 15 castes with 3.2% of SC population, will get 1% share in the quota pie; Group-2 with 18 castes and 62% population get 9% share, while Group-3 with 26 castes and 33.96% population have been awarded the remaining 5%.

This restructuring follows long-standing demands for equitable distribution of reservation benefits among all SC sub-castes, particularly from the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS).

A one-man commission under Justice Shameem Akhtar drafted the bill which was passed during the recent Budget session of the assembly on March 17.

# India intensifies bid to extradite fugitive Choksi

Team to travel to Belgium to seek custody of arrested diamantaire named in PNB scam

JAYANTH JACOB
@ New Delhi

THE Indian government has intensified efforts to extradite fugitive diamond trader Mehul Choksi following his April 12 arrest in Antwerp, Belgium.

Sources said a multi-agency Indian team is likely to travel to Belgium to push for Choksi's extradition in connection with the ₹13,000 crore PNB loan fraud case. The process will need to pass through Belgium's domestic legal system.

Earlier this year, India submitted an extradition request under a 2020 bilateral treaty after learning that Choksi was residing in Antwerp. Belgian authorities executed an Indian arrest warrant after the Antwerp Public Prosecutor's Office deemed the foreign warrant enforceable. The arrest was carried out as Choksi was allegedly preparing to move to Switzerland.

Choksi seemed to have submitted "forged documents" to obtain residency, concealing his Indian and Antiguan citizenship. "He is being detained and further judicial proceedings are awaited and as per the local law, access to his legal counsel has been assured," sources said.

"The India and Belgium treaty... covers fraud, money laundering, cheating and economic crimes related to taxation and revenue — many of them relevant in case of Mehul Choksi. We are working on the extradition process and we have already shared all the necessary documents with the Belgium authorities," sources said. The ED and CBI have been pursuing Choksi's extradition. Choksi had fled India in 2018.

Both Choksi and his nephew Nirav Modi are wanted for allegedly defrauding Punjab National Bank (PNB) of over ₹13,500 crore in 2018.

PNB had filed a criminal complaint naming Choksi, Modi, and the managing director of Gitanjali Gems, for orchestrating the fraud.

Choksi's lawyer Vijay Agarwal said the grounds for an appeal would be that Choksi is "not a flight risk, is extremely sick and undergoing treatment for cancer".

A file picture of Mehul Choksi. He is in Antwerp after being denied bail | ANI

**ARSON ATTACK**

# Now, Waqf Act protests spread to South Bengal

SULAGNA SENGUPTA @Kolkata

CLASHES erupted between police and Indian Secular Front (ISF) members protesting against the Waqf (Amendment) Act at Bhangor in South 24-Parganas district of West Bengal on Monday when police put up a barricade to stop the protesters from marching towards Kolkata. A large police force was deployed to bring the situation under control.

"What started as a demonstration escalated and took a communal colour," said an eyewitness.

The situation in violence-hit Murshidabad was tense, yet under control after three days of protests. Many shops have reopened and families displaced by the clashes have started to return homes. Zafarabad, Suti, Dhuliyan, Shamsherganj, and Jangipur are the areas worst-hit by the violence. In Zafrabad, a large number of houses and shops belonging to Hindus were reportedly set ablaze, forcing many to flee. Temples were vandalised during the unrest.

The Calcutta High Court had to instruct that Central forces be deployed in Murshidabad along with the state police.

Police vehicles set on fire by members of Indian Secular Front | PTI

# Mining heaps misery on Sandur residents

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

RISING air pollution, lack of pulmonologists and health facilities, and absence of proper air quality monitoring facility is forcing people in villages in the heart of the mining hub of Sandur in Ballari district to consider relocating for their survival.

Sandur has no air quality monitoring station, while the one that the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) manages manually at Kuvempunagar, a locality in Ballari city, is almost 50 km from Sandur. The regional laboratory assessing data is in Raichur, almost 200 km from Sandur.

A KSPCB official said, "A proposal to set up a vehicle-mounted, automated air pollution monitoring centre at Sandur has been approved, but it is yet to be set up."

Dr Basa Reddy N, a surgeon at Ballari District Hospital, said an increasing number of people in and around Sandur are complaining of breathing problems and lung infections. A district health officer said, "Cases of people complaining of allergies and lung infections are rising. There is a need for specialised equipment to test and treat people with respiratory infections. But hospitals in the district, let alone the primary health centres (PHCs), have no such facilities. We have to send them to Ballari."

As the air monitoring centre is so far away from Sandur, the report prepared by KSPCB shows the Air Quality Index (AQI) between "good" and "satisfactory" category (24-63) and Particulate Matter-10 (PM-10) between 24-128 micrograms per metre cube. This gives no accurate status of the prevailing levels of air pollution that people in and around Sandur are exposed to.

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**EXPRESS READ**

## Indefinite strike by truckers from today

Bengaluru: Truckers under the Federation of Karnataka State Lorry Owners and Agents Association said they will go on an indefinite strike from Monday midnight demanding the govt to roll back diesel price hike. They also placed four other demands. It said it has support of over 60 forums P4

## CET begins today, 3.31 lakh eligible to write

Bengaluru: The Common Entrance Test (CET) for admissions to professional courses in Karnataka, including engineering, is scheduled to begin from today. While the Kannada language exam for specific candidates will be on the first day, the tests for other subjects will be on April 16 and 17 P2

## 'Hubballi minor girl raped before murder'

Hubballi: The worst fears of the parents of the minor who was murdered in Hubballi came true when Nagalakshmi Choudhary, president of Karnataka State Women's Commission, said the initial probe indicated rape on the minor. On Monday, she visited the family of the five-year-old P3

**PM MODI ACCUSES**

CONG OF INSULTING Dr AMBEDKAR

Criticising Congress for its treatment of Dr BR Ambedkar, Modi said it insulted him, orchestrated his electoral defeats, and conspired to exclude him from the system P8

# Water crisis: Over 100 jeans units shut temporarily in Ballari

KIRAN BALANNANAVAR @ Ballari

THE summer season has adversely affected the famed jeans industry here again. Over 100 jeans units have shut, though temporarily, as a severe shortage of water has hit the industry hard, leaving hundreds of people unemployed.

The problem has been persisting for over a month and the units that are still running are using tanker water, which is expensive. The industry association has requested the administration to provide sufficient water to run the units.

Ballari district is the jeans capital of the country and 732 units are located in and around the district. Though water shortage occurs every summer for the last ten years, no solution has been found, and repeated requests by the industry association has been ignored by administration officials and leaders of political parties.

Especially jeans washing units need more water and they have increased their prices by 30-40%, which is also one of the reasons for the units to shut down, the association said. Water tankers too have increased the prices, putting a burden on these washing units.

An owner of one of the units told The New Indian Express that this year, the summer started 15 days early, putting pressure on them.

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Workers washing jeans products at a washing unit in Ballari | EXPRESS

**DEVINE TOUCH**

# *Prayer and devotional songs ahead of every match: LSG's traditional touch*

FIROZ MIRZA @ Lucknow

THERE are different rituals teams perform before a series or a season. And sometimes before every match. There are beliefs each team has. Lucknow Super Giants is one such team this IPL to follow a more traditional and pious path to invoke the spirits.

Unlike other franchises, Lucknow Super Giants perform a Puja at the South Corridor, South Block here at the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow followed by Ganesh Aarti before every match. Even when Lucknow were to face Chennai Super Kings on Monday.

The soothing voice of famous singer Anuradha Paudwal fills the air with devotional songs spreading positivity.

"Yes, we perform Puja before every home match here at the venue," Vinay Chopra, LSG's chief executive officer, told this daily. The practice is an attempt to inculcate Indian tradition in the league. The puja is performed in the presence of whosoever is available in the team management.

It's not that other teams do not perform Puja or follow religious rituals. But most of them perform it at the beginning of the season. Take for instance, Punjab Kings, whose home games are being hosted in relatively newer venue Mullanpur, Chandigarh. They organised a Havan (a sacred fire ritual) at the venue with head coach Ricky Ponting, players and other support staff attending the customary practice. "Yes, we hold religious rituals ahead of the tournament seeking blessings of God. A prayer will also be organised before PBKS's first game in Dharamsala," a PBKS spokesperson told this daily.

Given the importance of the Monday's game, Chennai Super Kings CEO Kasi Viswanathan has also accompanied the team to Lucknow. When asked about any customary practice the team follows at Chepauk, he said, "I am a devotee of Ganesha so I offer prayer everyday. There are individuals who like to pray before matches and they do so but collectively as a team we do not offer prayers." LSG might be different in this sense but the pious beginning in following Indian traditions is certainly a commendable step.

On the ground though things did not go the way they would have wanted. The visiting team restricted them to just 166 runs in their allotted 20 overs. CSK overhauled the target in the last over. The Lucknow team is fourth on the IPL points table.

LSG skipper Rishabh Pant on way to half century against CSK on Tuesday | AFP